

Light



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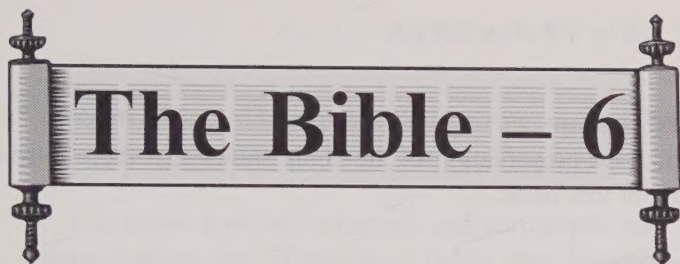
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Cover picture: Street in old Jerusalem



Reading the Bible

DURING LAST YEAR in a series of articles in this magazine, we have looked at the Bible as a book, its structure, how it came to be written, what '*inspiration*' means and the evidence for the Bible's reliability. If you have not been a regular reader of '*LIGHT on a New World*' or want to look at the articles again, the Correspondence Secretary will be pleased to send you back numbers as follows:

' <i>What is the Bible</i> '	Volume 18.8
' <i>The beginnings of the Bible</i> '	Volume 18.8
' <i>Translating the Bible</i> '	Volume 18.9
' <i>The English Translations</i> '	Volume 18.9
' <i>Can we trust the Bible?</i> '	Volume 18.11

What has been encouraging for both the writer and the editor is the number of readers who have been in contact to say that they have found this series particularly interesting with comments such as '*It is good to know more about the background of a book which is so important.*'

EVIDENCE FOR INSPIRATION

The last article looked at the various arguments that support the reliability of the Bible among which are:

- **Archaeology**

Biblical archaeology has shown that we can rely on the Bible narrative. Historical accounts and details about places that were doubted at one time, have been shown to be accurate.

- **Preservation**

The miraculous preservation of the Bible shows that there is something special about this book.

- **Harmony**

The harmony between the teaching of 40 separate writers, who wrote at different times over a period of one thousand five hundred years and who came from widely differing backgrounds, tells us that there is something unique about the Bible's message.

- **Bible Prophecy**

The fulfilment of Bible prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments: prophecies about individuals and nations, cities and events; prophecies which could not by any stretch of the imagination have been produced so unerringly by any man on his own. All these are evidence that, *'prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit'* [2 Peter 1. 21].

THE BIBLE IN OUR OWN LANGUAGE

Wherever we are in the world and whatever language we speak, we can read the words of Moses and the laws that were given to the nation of Israel many centuries ago. We can listen to the sublime message of the Old Testament prophets as they looked forward to the coming of the Saviour. We can understand the message of Jesus himself as he showed the shallowness and hypocrisy of the leaders of his day and as he spoke about the purpose of his death and resurrection. He taught his hearers about the coming of the Kingdom of God – and all this we have in our own language.

We can follow the exciting story of the development of Christianity in the first century, the establishment of the first churches and we can hold in our hands, in a form that can be easily understood, the letters that were written to those early Christian communities. Their needs were so like our own. The inspired teaching in these letters

is just as relevant today. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica:

‘...you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you as a father does his own children, that you would live a life worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not **as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which also effectively works in you who believe.’ [1 Thessalonians 2. 11–13]

SO...DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

On one occasion after his death and resurrection, Jesus said to Peter, “*Do you love me more than these?*” Peter replied, “*Yes Lord; you know that I love you.*” Jesus said, “*Feed my lambs.*” Jesus asked the question the second time and Peter again replied, “*Yes Lord, you know that I love you.*” Jesus said, “*Tend my sheep*”. The third time Jesus asked the same question, Peter, upset that he had been asked the same question three times, said, “*Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.*” Jesus said to him, “*Feed my sheep*” [John 21.15-17].

There is an academic satisfaction in recognising that the threefold question and the way in which Jesus makes Peter answer, very nicely balances the threefold denial of Peter after Jesus was arrested – but that is not the message of the incident. The teaching of the narrative is that each time Jesus says to Peter, ‘If you love me, if you are truly my disciple, then do something about it. Feed my sheep. Share the Gospel message. Give my sheep the message of hope that you have learned from me.’

The message of the articles about the Bible should have the same effect on us.

It is good to know something about the background to the Bible but the important thing is to do something about it. Don't just treat it as something of academic interest. Read the Bible for yourself so you can understand more of its message for today. If the Bible has come from God, if this holy book is God's Word to us - then...do something about it. Read the Bible so that you can know what God has revealed of Himself and of His purpose.

If the Bible does contain prophecies about individuals and nations, about cities and events – which have been fulfilled in the tiniest details, we can be confident that other prophecies are certain to be fulfilled, including prophecies about God's plan for the world, about the return of Jesus and the events that will herald his 'Second Coming'. We can be certain that when the Bible foretells a time when all the world's problems will be solved, then that time **will** come. God *'has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death'* [Acts 17. 31 GNB].

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING

So...do something about it. Read the Bible and find out more about the personal message of salvation that it contains. This is exactly what the Bible itself tells us to do. Paul reminded his son in the faith Timothy, that from childhood he had *'known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work'* [2 Timothy 3.15- 17].

In many practical ways the importance of reading is underlined. The Christians at Colosse were told to pass on to the church at Laodicea, the letter that had been written to them, and Paul said that

they in turn should read the letter to the Laodicean church. [*Colossians 4. 16*].

Jesus criticised the leaders of his day for their lack of understanding in very telling words. Time and time again he prefaced his teaching with the words, '*Have you never read what Moses wrote...*', '*Don't you remember what the prophets wrote*', '*Have you never read...*' Of course they should have both read and remembered what Moses wrote, what the prophets had written and what the Psalms taught:

'How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word.'

'Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law.'

'Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; Indeed I shall observe it with my whole heart.'

'Your word has given me life.'

'The entrance of your words gives light.'

'Let your hand become my help, for I have chosen your precepts.'

[*Psalm 119. 9, 18, 33,34, 50, 130, 173*]

IN OUR OWN LANGUAGE

We can only let God's hand become our help, if we know what has been written. We can only allow His Word to give us life, if we know what He has said. We have the privilege of being able to read the Bible in the language we all speak and write, so when Jesus says to us – as he did to people in his day – '*Have you never read?*' We have no

excuse. We have no excuse not to read the Bible for ourselves. We are privileged to have God's Word in our hands so let's make sure it is not only in our hands, but in our hearts and minds too. We can only do this by reading.

A NEW START FOR A NEW YEAR

What better time to commence reading the Bible for ourselves than at the start of a New Year! How do we begin? The obvious place to start is at the beginning.

The first book of the Bible is the book of 'Genesis'. This will tell us about the beginning of things. The book opens with a simple but profound statement: '*In the beginning God...*' and we will remember from the first article in this series that the Hebrew word for this opening is '*Genesis*' – the name of the book. We will then read about the failure of the first human pair to be obedient to God and the results of their sin. We will read about Noah and the flood; about the call of Abraham and the wonderful promises that God made to him because of the tremendous faith and trust that he showed in God.

These promises were repeated to Isaac and Jacob, Abraham's son and grandson. We may already know from other 'Light' articles, that in the New Testament these promises to Abraham are referred to as 'The Gospel' [*Galatians 3.8*]. Genesis finishes with the story of Joseph, another example of God's purpose being worked out in the life of a man who trusted in Him in spite of everything seeming to be against him.

We could instead start reading from the first book of the New Testament – Matthew. This will tell us about the birth of Jesus. Matthew emphasises how many of the events in Jesus' life were the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Then we will read about the temptation of Jesus, his teaching, his miracles and the parables he told. The book finishes with an account of the betrayal, trial and crucifixion of Jesus and then the miracle of his resurrection.

We have to remember that the Bible books will be different in style and in what they are about. Some books will be more difficult to understand than others. The first book of Chronicles begins with nine chapters of names – lists of the genealogies of the tribes of Israel – this is very difficult to read. The book of Ruth tells the story of a foreign girl's love for both her mother-in-law and for the religious faith of her husband's family and people after he had died. It is a beautiful and emotional story which includes the moving words of Ruth to her mother-in-law:

'Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.'

[Ruth 1. 16]

At the very end of the book of Ruth, we learn that the dedication and faith of this woman from Moab resulted in her being one of the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

READING SYSTEMATICALLY

If we think of reading the Word of God as being a way of taking in 'spiritual food', then there are some practical lessons we can learn from the way we take in our natural food. First – we need to eat regularly. It is not a healthy approach to nutrition to have a 'binge' at the weekend and eat until we are bloated, then not eat again until the next weekend. For a healthy life we need to have a balanced diet. We need to eat portions that we can properly digest and we need to take in those portions on a regular daily basis. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, '*Give us day by day our daily bread*' [Luke 11.3]. It is even more important with our spiritual food.

Christadelphians use a set of tables called 'The Bible Companion' to direct and organise our reading. By this plan we read three portions from the Bible each day. At the start of the year, these begin at Genesis, Psalms and Matthew and each portion will generally consist

of one or two chapters (see page 10). If we follow this scheme, by the end of the year we will have read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice. The reading will take about 30 minutes each day – less time than we take eating our natural food. Jesus spoke of himself and of his teaching as *‘The bread of life’*.

The Bible itself makes it clear that reading God’s Word is not just about going through the process of following the words. It is not about coming to the end of the chapter, closing the Bible and mentally saying to ourselves, ‘I have done my Bible reading for today’. David wrote *‘your testimonies are my meditation’* [Psalm 119. 99]. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi about things which are true, noble, just and pure and he said *‘Think about these things’* [Philippians 4. 8].

Whether we are reading just one or two chapters a day, or whether we are using a systematic plan like the one described above – having come to the end of our reading **we need to think about it**. It can be helpful to ask ourselves some questions – ‘What have I been reading about? Have I understood what I have been reading? Does the story or the message of what I have read connect with any other part of the Bible I can think of? (This is something which is easier when we have been reading for some while!) Are there any lessons I can learn? Is there anything I need to do (or change) as a result of what I have read?’

If we get into the habit of reading the Bible regularly, of thinking carefully about what we read, of trying to put its teaching into practice in our lives **and** of asking God in our prayers to help us to do this, then, like Timothy, we will find that the Scriptures will make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

We have made a number of quotations from Psalm 119 in this article. We have not quoted what is perhaps the most well known verse in that Psalm; we have saved that quotation for the end. David was able to say these words with absolute confidence. May our regular reading of the Scriptures enable us all to do the same.

**‘How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter
than honey to my mouth!**

**Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.**

**Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.**

**I have sworn and confirmed
that I will keep your righteous judgements’**

[Psalm 119.103-106]

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The Bible Companion

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Bible Characters

David

WRITING A FULL character study of David, one of the Bible's most interesting and important people, would no doubt yield enough material to fill an entire book. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, we will focus on three main strengths of David's character.

The Bible records hold a large amount of information about David in a number of different books. David was the third king of Israel, after Ishbosheth the son of Saul. He was the father of Solomon, who succeeded him at his death.

DAVID'S SINGLE-MINDEDNESS

The first aspect we would like to consider is David's single-mindedness. He was a man who was extremely focused and once he had decided on a course of action he would not be turned from it. He was single-minded in doing God's will and would always ask God for advice before taking action. We have an example of this in David's approach to dealing with the enemies of Israel: *'And David enquired of God, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hand?" And the LORD said to him, "Go up, for I will deliver them into your hand." So they went up to Baal Perazim and David defeated them there' [1 Chronicles 14.10,11].*

David showed great single-mindedness in the establishment of the nation of Israel. The surrounding tribes and countries were attacked and dealt with ruthlessly. He did not seek to sign treaties with his enemies but looked to destroy them and drive them out as God had commanded. He set this precedent right from the start when as a

young man he fought the Philistine giant, Goliath and preserved the honour of the nation of Israel.

David was extremely single-minded in terms of justice. For him there were no 'grey areas'. He saw everything in terms of light versus darkness – good versus evil. This can make some people perceive David as a harsh and unforgiving man but in reality it shows the strength of David's character and purpose. David was relentlessly pursued by King Saul yet David never lifted his hand against God's anointed king even when the opportunity presented itself to kill his adversary. Saul knew that one day David would be king and he made a covenant (or pact) with David that he would do no harm to Saul's descendants after his death [1 Samuel 24.21,22].

When Saul was killed in a battle with the Philistines, David ordered the death of the man who claimed to have slain Saul. David said to him: *"How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?"* Then David called one of the young men and said, *"Go near, and execute him!"* And he struck him so that he died' [2 Samuel 1.14,15]. Afterwards David remembered the covenant he had made with Saul and avenged the death of Saul's son Ishbosheth [2 Samuel 4.8-12].

But David's single-mindedness was not always a positive trait. We can see his focus on the wrong things in the account concerning David and Bathsheba. David saw Bathsheba and desired her and single-mindedly went after her, at the cost of his moral principles, of alienating his loyal friends and sinning against God. It's a humbling lesson to learn that even David, who was described as a man after God's own heart [1 Samuel 13.14] could do such terrible things.

DAVID'S HUMILITY

The next aspect of David's character that we would like to explore is his humility. Perhaps the greatest example of David's humility occurred directly after the events mentioned above. In the second book

of Samuel we read that Nathan the prophet came to David and pointed out in no uncertain terms the wickedness of David's actions and the punishment that he would receive in these words:

'Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife... Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house... Thus says the LORD; Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun' [2 Samuel 12.9-12].

David's reaction to these punishments shows his great humility. He accepted his guilt and the Divine punishment without any argument or any anger. David said to Nathan: '*I have sinned against the LORD*' [2 Samuel 12.13]. David's acknowledgement of his sin and his repentance are expressed in the words of Psalm 51:

Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to your loving-kindness;
According to the multitude of your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in your sight...' [Psalm 51.1-4].

Although David was a mighty warrior and the king of a strong nation, he did not lose his understanding of God's power and authority. In the second book of Samuel, we find an example of David's humility.

David danced and rejoiced before the Lord when the ark, the symbol of the Divine presence in the midst of Israel, was brought back to Jerusalem. He was criticised and looked down on by Michal his wife because of it. She felt a king should not have to get involved in such things. David pointed out that it was God who had given him the kingship and He alone was worthy of all praise [2 Samuel 6 15-22].

David's humility and complete trust in God is reflected in a number of his personal Psalms. The Psalms of David are an acknowledgement of God's power and His great mercy. In them, David also writes of his personal weakness, his failings and his utter dependence on God. In Psalm 61 he is shown also to be a man of prayer:

‘Hear my cry, O God;
Attend to my prayer.
From the end of the earth I will cry to you,
When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
For you have been a shelter for me,
And a strong tower from the enemy.
I will abide in your tabernacle for ever;
I will trust in the shelter of your wings’

[Psalm 61.1-4].

For a man of power and wealth to write such words shows true humility. (Psalms 41, 64 and 69 are further examples of the humility of this Godly king).

DAVID'S LOVE FOR GOD

The final aspect I would like to consider when looking at David's character is love. God *is* a God of love to those who draw near to Him in true humility and seek to honour Him in their lives. David reflected this Divine characteristic of love in his personal life.

David loved his land and his people. He moulded the tribes of Israel into a single nation, just as God had asked him to do. David's love and respect for his God meant that he did not kill King Saul when he could have done. David said that he would not lift his hand against the LORD'S anointed [1 Samuel 24. 6,7].

David loved Jonathan, Saul's eldest son and was grief stricken when he heard of his death [2 Samuel 1.11,12]. The words of his lamentation for Jonathan remind us of the closeness of their friendship based as it was on the love of God: *'I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women'* [2 Samuel 1.26]. This love extended to Jonathan's family, even after his death and Mephibosheth one of Jonathan's sons, was treated kindly by David [2 Samuel 9].

David loved his son Absalom with the same paternal love that God had for David. Even though Absalom had caused the nation of Israel to rebel against the king, he put aside all Absalom's wrong doings and his treachery, and forgave him. Even when David's army was going to fight against Absalom's forces, David asked his commanders to *"deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom"* [2 Samuel 18.5].

When David heard of Absalom's death, he was heartbroken and said, *"O my son Absalom... if only I had died in your place!"* [2 Samuel 18.33]. This brings to mind the words of Jesus: *"Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for his friends"* [John 15.13].

The Psalms are perhaps the greatest testimony to David's love for God and God's ways. They are truly poetic words, written by a man whose heart was filled with love and moved by the Spirit of God, a man who is so aptly described as the sweet psalmist of Israel [2 Samuel 23.1].

Psalm 18 which is repeated almost word for word in the second book of Samuel chapter 22, concludes with these words which are an acknowledgement of the Divine hand throughout David's eventful life :

The LORD lives!
Blessed be my Rock!
Let the God of my salvation be exalted.
He delivers me from my enemies.
You also lift me up above those who rise against me;
You have delivered me from the violent man.
Therefore I will give thanks to you, O LORD,
among the Gentiles,
And sing praises to your name [*Psalm 18.46,48,49*].

GREAT DAVID'S GREATER SON

The three aspects of David's character that we have looked at can also be found in the character of another man, whose life's work and purpose are shown throughout the Scriptures. Single-minded, humble and loving - three words that help sum up the character of Jesus. David was promised that one of his descendants would be the Son of God and establish an eternal kingdom with it's capital Jerusalem [*1 Chronicles 17.11-14*]. Jesus Christ was that son and he showed the same beauty of character as his ancestor David, but to an even greater extent. David, the man after God's own heart, looked forward to the time when his descendant would sit on his throne in Jerusalem. Psalm 16 reminds us of the hope that he had in future work of Christ:

I have set the LORD always before me;
Because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope.
For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, (the grave)
Nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption.
You will show me the path of life;
In your presence is fullness of joy;
At your right hand are pleasures for evermore.'

[*Psalm 16.8-11*]

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The Law of Moses

- its relevance today

The Sabbath

AFTER THE ISRAELITES came out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, God led them through the desert to Mount Sinai where God made a covenant with them and they were constituted a nation. (see Exodus 19.3-6). A nation needs laws and God gave them detailed laws covering every aspect of their daily lives.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

These laws are set out in great detail in the books of Moses namely Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In Exodus chapter 20 we find the first list of commandments which are known as the 10 commandments and the fourth of these is:

‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it’

[Exodus 20.8-11].

The purpose of the Sabbath day was more than just an opportunity for the Jews to rest from daily work. It was a weekly opportunity to devote themselves to the service of God. To enable this ideal to be carried out without any distractions, even relatively simple tasks such as lighting fires and gathering firewood were forbidden and travel was limited to a short distance from home – *'a Sabbath days journey'*.

The penalty for disobeying this Divine command was a harsh one. In the book of Numbers we read about a man who was observed gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. He was brought to Moses and we read: *'Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death..."'* [Numbers 15.35]. Later in the history of the Jews there were serious lapses in the observance of the Sabbath day and the prophet Amos records the attitude of the people in his day who said *'when will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat?'* [Amos 8.5].

GOD RESTED

We note from the passage in Exodus chapter 20 that the requirement to do no work on the Sabbath day was a reminder to the Israelites of the way in which God created the world in which they lived. In these words we have the reason for the Sabbath Law. It was a reminder of the great work of the Creator in transforming a lifeless world into a place of wonder and beauty, teeming with all forms of plant and animal life. The book of Genesis tells us this took six days and on the seventh day God rested [Genesis 2.2,3].

This set a pattern for the future and God also *'hallowed'* the Sabbath day. In other words it became a holy day for that is what the word *'hallowed'* means. However there was no requirement to observe the Sabbath before the time of Moses. There was also no requirement for other nations to keep it – it was a law which was only given to God's people the nation of Israel. This is a very important point, because some people claim that Christians must keep the Sabbath day.

‘THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN’

In New Testament times, the religious leaders had turned the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath law, into a mere ritual – a religious observance of the ‘letter’ but not the ‘spirit’ of the Law. This brought Jesus into verbal conflict with them. On one occasion when Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees retorted: *‘This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath’* [John 9.16].

On another occasion Jesus was walking through a field of ripe corn on the Sabbath day with his disciples and the record tells us that *‘His disciples began to pluck the ears of corn’* [Mark 2.23]. This seemingly innocent action provoked the Pharisees to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath law. To those zealous in the precise details of the Law of Moses, the action of the disciples in plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath day was just as much breaking the Sabbath law as reaping and threshing the whole field! We should notice however that Jesus did not deny breaking the Sabbath. Rather he justified his actions by quoting from their Old Testament Scriptures. He said:

“...Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?” And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” [Mark 2.25-28].

What does Jesus teach us here? Firstly, that David, a man held in special esteem by God and of great significance in the Divine purpose, also ate forbidden food in time of need. The unspoken inference is that if David could do this, then the greater Son of David was also free from condemnation. In a parallel passage we find recorded the

additional reminder that the restrictions of the Sabbath did not apply to the priesthood; here was one whose priesthood was infinitely greater. Then finally comes that uncompromising statement that *'the Son of man is also Lord of the Sabbath'*.

'CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW'

Jesus was many times rebuked by the Pharisees for breaking the rest day. Jesus justified his actions by declaring his authority to do so and by strongly implying that so far as he and his followers were concerned, there would be eventually no further necessity to keep the Sabbath. We can see the reason for this in the comments of the Apostle Paul. The ritual of the Law, of which the Sabbath rules were but one element, was done away with by Jesus, because he was its fulfilment and it therefore served no further purpose. Paul wrote to the 1st Century believers:

'For Christ is the end of the law...' [*Romans 10.4*].

'...the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith' [*Galatians 3.24*].

'having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross
[*Colossians 2.14 NIV*].

These are typical of the statements of Paul on the subject, and he mentions the sabbath in particular, saying that the followers of Christ are under no obligation to observe religious occasions of the previous age: *'Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival...or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ'* [*Colossians 2.16,17 NIV*].

'I WILL GIVE YOU REST'

So far we have commented on the negative aspects of the case; that the Mosaic ritual has been superceded and that there is no longer any need to treat one day as different from another. Does this mean that all obligation to worship and serve God has also vanished? Certainly not. Referring to the Law of Moses, Jesus said: *'I did not come to destroy, but to fulfil'* [Matthew 5.17]. The rules for Christian worship laid down by Jesus fulfil the intentions of the Law in the fullest sense. It can readily be seen how this was so with the Sabbath. It is significant for example, that immediately before the account of the incident in the cornfields, Matthew records the appeal of Jesus: *'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'* [Matthew 11.28]. Although this is clear in itself, added point is given to it by the letter to the Hebrews: *'For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works, as God did from his'* [Hebrews 4.10].

It becomes evident then, in the light of these passages, that those who answer Jesus' appeal and begin a life of service to God, can be considered figuratively to have entered a perpetual Sabbath rest. We can see how this is so when we remember the point of the original Sabbath; to turn from selfish activity, to spend a day dedicated to the worship of God. This does not mean that God wants us to give up our daily employment. Even Paul did not do this, in spite of the heavy demands made upon him by his task of preaching. Rather it is a re-direction of purpose that is called for. Those who take no account of God give all their energies to self indulgence and the pursuit of pleasure.

To enter into the spirit of the Sabbath, means to turn from this burden of selfish cares and instead to centre one's attention – one's life – on the service and worship of God. Instead of this activity reaching a peak one day in seven however, the true Christian must try to maintain his service equally every day of the week. Again this is summarised in the teaching of Jesus: *'If anyone desires to come after*

me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me' [Luke 9.23]. This is the true Christians obligation - to follow Christ 'daily'.

A MILLENNIAL SABBATH OF REST

If we look carefully at the context of the passage which we quoted from the fourth chapter of the letter to the Hebrews however, we see that the sense in which believers in God's word have entered into a Sabbath rest, is largely prospective. The fullest and most important fulfilment of the Mosaic sabbath is yet to come for we read:

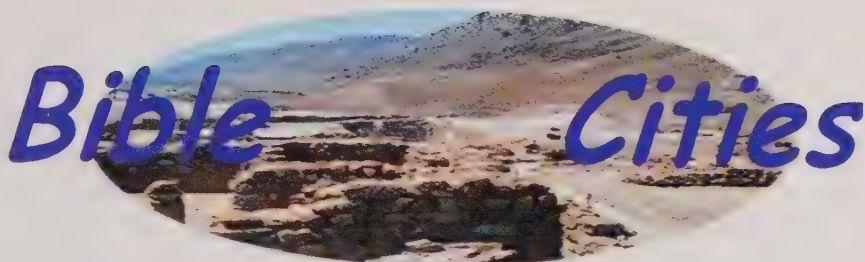
'There remains therefore a rest for the people of God...Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest...' [Hebrews 4.9,11].

The writer here urges us to bend our efforts to enter into something which was then and is still today, future. To what does he refer? - to the very subject of Christ's teaching; indeed to the theme of the entire Bible, the Kingdom of God.

The history of mankind has continued for around 6,000 years or six millennial days. It is the seventh millennium which is described as 'the Sabbath day's rest' which still awaits the people of God. In this marvellous age, the earth will be at peace, freed from the evils which attend the present misrule of men and the consideration of its inhabitants will be the worship of God. It is to this 'rest' that we are invited.

At the beginning of the fourth chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that '*a promise remains of entering his rest*' but there follows the warning that many '*shall not enter my rest*' [Hebrews 4.1-3]. Let us grasp the opportunity now, by taking up our cross daily and following Christ for tomorrow may be too late!

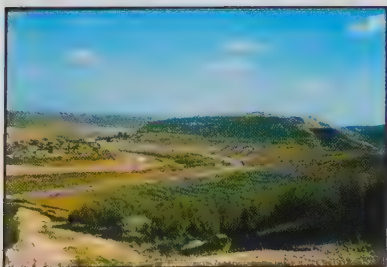
Colin Dryland
London, England



Lachish

THE SITE OF ancient Lachish, or Tell ed-Duweir, is located on the modern road map of Israel, roughly halfway between Askelon and Hebron and 30 miles south west of Jerusalem. As you round a bend of the approach road the impressive mound hits the eye, rising some 63 feet above the surrounding fields. The levelled crown covers an area of 20 acres. The part of ancient Israel that the fortress had dominated, is now named after the city – the Lachish region. Lachish was one of the most powerful and important cities in ancient times, particularly in the period of Israel's kingdom (1020-500 BC).

Archaeological excavations at Lachish have found at least nine layers of settlement dating from 3000 BC to the third century BC. Two



Site of Lachish

of the earlier Canaanite rulers of Lachish are named in letters found at Tell el Amarna in Egypt, and in them they write defending themselves against accusations of disloyalty to the Egyptian ruler of the time, Pharaoh Akhenaton. The dominating influence of Egypt over the Canaanites of this period is confirmed by the finding,

during excavations at Lachish, of a pottery bowl with Egyptian script inscribed on it detailing the amount of wheat produced in the fourth year of an unnamed Pharaoh.

Lachish is first mentioned in the Bible at the time of the Divinely ordained invasion of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, led by Joshua

1220-1200 BC). The Israelites had already taken the cities of Jericho and Ai and had also reached an agreement with the inhabitants of Gibeon. Some of the Amorite rulers, when they heard about the advancing armies of Israel and the pact they had already made with the Gibeonites, were rightfully scared. We read that *'Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me and help me, that we may attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel"'* [Joshua 10.3.4].

The combined armies of these five Amorite kings then besieged the Gibeonites, who promptly called on Joshua to save them. The record tells us that Joshua acted on God's command, *'And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand"... So the LORD routed them before Israel'* [Joshua 10.8,10].

Having defeated these armies in the field and following the death of the five kings, the Israelites then attacked their cities one by one, including Lachish with the result that *'the LORD delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, who took it on the second day'* [Joshua 10.32]. The Biblical record in Joshua then goes on to record for us the eventual conquest and settling of the land by the Israelites.

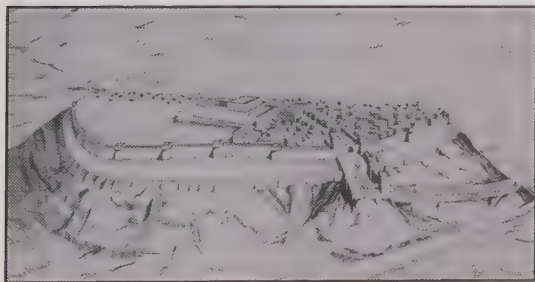
The inheritance allotted to the tribe of Judah includes a list of the cities they possessed, and in that list we find named those cities of the five kings, including Lachish. Jerusalem is also in the list, but the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem were not driven out [Joshua 15.35,39,54,63]. It was left to King David to complete the conquest of the land, taking Jerusalem and making that city God's chosen capital.

But it was David's grandson, King Rehoboam, (930-913 BC) who later, when the kingdom had split in two, carried out a large construction programme in the southern half of the land. We read that *'Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah'* [2 Chronicles 11.5]. We then have a list of fifteen cities that includes

Lachish. *'And he fortified the strongholds, and put captains in them, and stores of food, oil, and wine. Also in every city he put shields and spears, and made them very strong.'* [2 Chronicles 11.11,12].

The archaeological excavations at Lachish have revealed that Rehoboam's fortified city was surrounded by two walls. The inner wall was built on the top perimeter of the tell and was 20 feet in thickness. The outer wall was erected some 52 feet down the slope of the tell. The entrance to the city was by a steeply sloping road at the southwest corner that you can still walk up to get to the top of the tell. These fortifications by Rehoboam made Lachish the second most important city after Jerusalem

The story of Lachish really comes to life in the time of King Hezekiah (715-686 BC), when the armies of Assyria under king Sennacherib invaded Judah from the North, sweeping down past Jerusalem to take the strategic fortified cities in the south, and so we



Reconstruction of Ancient City of Lachish

read: *'After this Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem (but he himself, and all the forces with him, laid siege against Lachish), to Hezekiah king of Judah'* [2 Chronicles 32.9].

The amazing thing about this attack on Lachish in 701 BC, is that it is actually pictured for us. The Assyrian king had no photographers as we have today, to document and show the world his conquests, so he did the next best thing, he had the record of the battle for Lachish drawn out and carved on stone to display on the walls of his palace in Nineveh.

These carved bas-reliefs were found by another archaeologist,

Austen Henry Layard, when he led an expedition in the late 1840's to excavate the ruins of Nineveh at Kuyunjik in today's northern Iraq. Layard found attached to the buried walls a series of panels 80 feet long which portray vividly the story of the fall of Lachish to Sennacherib's armies. They show in detail the mighty walls of Lachish being attacked with wheeled, armoured battering rams and the defeated inhabitants being led out by Assyrian soldiers, while in another scene we can see Sennacherib sitting on a throne receiving the city's surrender from an official.

These stone panels were carefully removed by Layard's team and transported by barge down the Tigris and then by sea to England where they are preserved in the British Museum and can now be examined by anyone with an interest in the Bible. They are a remarkable testimony to the historical accuracy of the record we have in God's Word.



The Siege of Lachish

But this isn't the end of the Lachish story, because Sennacherib then sent another army to besiege Jerusalem. Here a miracle occurred, after King Hezekiah, one of Judah's good kings, had offered earnest prayer to the Almighty. He was told by the prophet Isaiah that Sennacherib would not take Jerusalem, and so we read that *'the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh [2 Kings 19.35,36].*

After this divine intervention that cut short Sennacherib's campaign, the power of the Assyrian Empire began to wane and the Babylonian Empire began to rise, with Nineveh being captured in 612

BC. In the intervening years Lachish must have been rebuilt and re-armed, because the next we hear of Lachish is in the time of King Zedekiah (598-587 BC), the last king of Judah. By this time the southern kingdom of Judah was a vassal state paying tribute to the Babylonian Empire.

Around 589 BC, emboldened by promises of support from the Egyptians, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon. The Babylonians reacted by taking swift and ruthless action. They attacked and wiped out one by one the fortified cities of southern Judah cutting off any possible help from the Egyptians. The city of Lachish was among the last to fall and in the book of Jeremiah we read: *'Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, when the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for only these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah'* [Jeremiah 34.6,7].

Again, a unique find by the archaeologists at the site of Lachish confirms the biblical record of this Babylonian assault on Judah. Buried in the ruins of a room next to the remains of the city gate, twenty one ostraca (inscribed pottery fragments) were found, dating from the time of King Zedekiah. These short letters are reports written by a Judean soldier called Hoshayahu, from an unnamed outpost to the commanding officer of Lachish, named in the letters as Yuash.

Some of the 'Lachish Letters' as they are now known, describe exactly the situation faced by these defending soldiers manning isolated outposts in the last days of the kingdom of Judah. The letters are short and to the point - in one the soldier says he is not as simple as his commander thinks, he is able to read! Another mentions the passing through of a general on his way to Egypt, a reminder of the intrigues between Zedekiah and the Egyptians.

But the one that confirms Jeremiah's words reports that *'we are watching for the beacon from Lachish, following the signals you, sir,*

gave, but we do not see Azekah. It would appear from this letter that Azekah which lies about nine miles north of Lachish had probably fallen to the Babylonian army and they must have realised that it was their turn next at Lachish and the surviving outposts to face the might of Babylon. The ruins at Lachish still show the ferocity of the Babylonian assault. The results of intense fires against the walls can still be seen, great gaping holes were punched through those massive walls, the city fell and Jerusalem was next.

Jerusalem was taken and the temple destroyed in 587 BC and most of the population were then taken into captivity in Babylon. The biblical story of Lachish doesn't end there though. The Bible also foretold the eventual fall of Babylon to the Medo-Persian Empire and that the Jews who wanted to go back to their land would be allowed to return.(see Isaiah chapters 44 and 45). This happened in 538 BC when Cyrus issued the 'Edict of Restoration'.

The record of the return of the captives from Babylon is found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and it is there we find lists of people from the villages and cities of Judah who were allowed to return, among them Lachish. [*Nehemiah 11.30*]. The resettlement of the land revived the occupation of cities like Lachish in God's land, but it wasn't for long. Archaeological finds show that habitation of the site ceased around the second century BC.

Our study of the ancient Jewish city of Lachish reveals to us the hand of God at work in the destiny of His chosen people. At the same time we can see from archaeological finds uncovered on the site, the accuracy of the Bible's historical record given to us by the people chosen to record God's Word for us.

Ken Dennis
Kent, England

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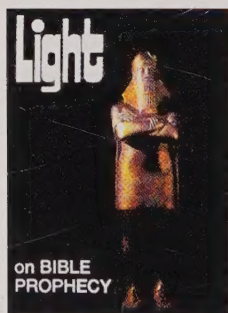
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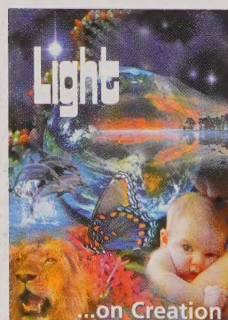
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